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ABSTRACT

Australia has a federal system, comprising the national Commonwealth government and eight state and territory governments. At the Commonwealth level, the ministries of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, and Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business have primary roles in the career information and services field. Education and training system is provided by the Australian Qualifications Framework, which provides a comprehensive nationally consistent framework for all qualifications in post-compulsory education and training. Vocational education and training is offered by a wide variety of providers. Although there is no national policy on career guidance services, the Australian government has adopted a number of strategies to improve outcomes for young people. They include focusing on achievement of minimum standard by all students in basic skills; increasing quality of vocational orientation for young people to gain experience in business while at school; and broadening the role of schools so that they are better equipped to assist students suffering multiple obstacles to success. Use of information technology in the career delivery system is constantly expanding. The recommendation for the future is for a more consistent approach to career guidance services to enhance employment, education, and training. (JDM)

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Career Development in Australia

By

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8. CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN AUSTRALIA

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The Australian Context

Australia is a large island (about the size of the United States) with a population of about 18 million, living mainly in urban environments on the eastern seaboard. Distance is a major issue in communication. Australia has a strongly multicultural population and a small but significant group of Indigenous peoples.

The Structure of Government

Australia has a federal system, comprising the national Commonwealth government and eight state and territory governments. The Commonwealth government collects and distributes taxes to the states and territories on a formula basis determined by the Commonwealth Grants Commission. These funds are distributed across service areas such as education, health, law and order, etc. There is also a system of local government that attends to traditional matters such as roads, rates and rubbish.

At the Commonwealth level, the portfolios (ministries) of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, and Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, have primary roles in the career information and services field. There are similar government portfolios at the state and territory level, with a more local focus.

The career information and services policy agenda is largely managed through the Ministerial Council of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), composed of relevant ministers from the Commonwealth, states and territories. In the careers field, the MCEETYA is advised by the Career Education Task Force composed of senior bureaucrats from related portfolios in the school education and technical (vocational) education sectors.

The Internal Environment

The Commonwealth regards the preparation of young people to engage actively and productively in social, economic and political life, as one of the most vital tasks of any society. Australian research shows that the reluctance of many employers to hire young people is driven as much by their perceptions of the attitudes and values of the coming generation as it

is by a perceived lack of basic skills. Research indicates that in addition to good literacy and numeracy skills, employers value communication skills, maturity, a willingness to learn, good presentation and work habits, stability and reliability, the ability to work in a team and loyalty to the firm. Employers frequently complain that young people have learned little in school that gives them an understanding of what it means to work regular hours in a business enterprise. Employers have indicated they are less likely to consider hiring young people who do not possess these basic personal attributes.

It is obvious that young people will not move into jobs unless employers are willing to hire them, and high levels of youth unemployment will not be eliminated until young people are as attractive to employers as older workers. Therefore, an effective strategy to address youth unemployment must address both the perceptions of employers and the realities (such as they may be) which give rise to these perceptions. The Commonwealth government is, therefore, pursuing institutional reform, both on the side of education and training, and on the side of government welfare and service provision.

All Australian governments, at the Commonwealth and state/territory levels, have invested considerable effort and resources in encouraging young people to remain in school to complete a full secondary education and also in the expansion of opportunities to engage in post-secondary education, particularly higher education. The following statistics show the effects of such policies:

- In 1984, 45 percent of young people beginning secondary schooling stayed to complete a full secondary education. In 1997, over 70 percent of young people completed a full secondary education.

- In 1985, 39.6 percent of 19 year olds participated in some form of education or training. In 1997, the proportion was over 54 percent.

- In 1984, 39 percent of young people who had left school in the previous year went on to further study or training. In 1998, the figure had risen to 58 percent.

Australia has entered the age of mass participation in education and training. Young people in Australia enjoy unprecedented levels of access to post-secondary education and training and represent the best-educated generation in the history of our country. This increase in participation in education and training was matched by, and was in part a response to, a sharp decline in opportunities for full-time youth employment, as the economy restructured toward industries requiring higher skill levels than many young people could provide. At the same time, increased retention at

school has delayed the age at which many young people begin full-time employment, reducing the wage differential between older and younger employees.

In August 1984, approximately 432,100 Australian teenagers (33.7 percent of the teenage population) were in full-time employment. Almost 15 years later, in January 1999, some 223,400 Australian teenagers (17.0 percent of the teenage population) were in full-time employment. In the recession of the early 1990s, the unemployment rate of teenagers looking for full-time work rose to over 30 percent, but had declined to 24.1 percent by January 1999. Full-time unemployed youth now account for 5.4 percent of the 15 to 19 age cohort.

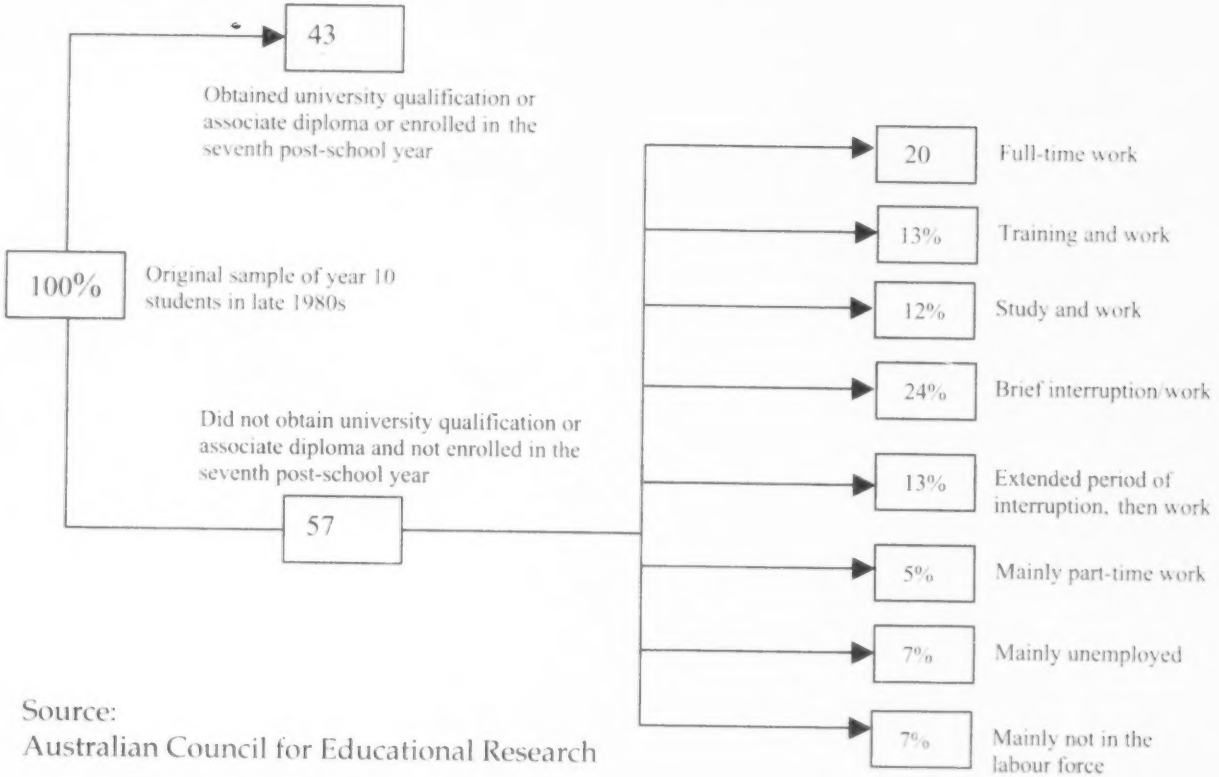
A recent analysis tracking the experience of school leavers from the late 1980s over a seven-year period showed that approximately five percent of young people were engaged in mainly part-time work across the first seven post-school years. A further seven percent were mainly unemployed during their transition from school. There was a further group of school leavers (some seven percent) who were mainly not in the labour force and not being studied from the time of leaving school. This situation is summarized in Figure 1.

The Education and Training System

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) provides a comprehensive, nationally consistent, yet flexible, framework for all qualifications in post-compulsory education and training. The Framework was introduced Australia-wide on January 1, 1995, and is being phased in over five years, with full implementation by 2000.

The AQF was developed under instruction from a state, territory and Commonwealth education and training ministers meeting as the MCEETYA. It was in response to a decision by the MCEETYA that the overall system of qualifications needed to support the reforms in vocational education and training. The Ministerial Council has established the AQF Advisory Board to protect the AQF qualification guidelines and to promote and monitor national implementation of the AQF.

Figure 1: Pathways of School Leavers Measured over the First Seven Post-School Years



Source:
Australian Council for Educational Research

The key objectives of the AQF are to:

- reflect closer integration of learning and work at all levels of the workplace;
- rationalize school qualifications, industry qualifications, vocational and academic qualifications into a single system of 12 qualifications;
- encourage continuous upgrading of knowledge and skills in areas previously without specified standards of competency or educational expectation;
- support flexible education and training pathways between schools, technical and further education (TAFE) institutions, private training institutions and universities, training in the workplace and lifelong experience;
- encourage parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications; and
- provide a clear and rational structure in which an increasingly deregulated training market can maintain credibility within the overall education and training system.

As Australia is a federation of state, territory and Commonwealth governments, the implementation of the AQF is the responsibility of state and territory governments, through their legislated authorities, including institutions. The system is summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Summary of the Australian Education Sector

Schools Sector	Vocational Education and Training Sector	Higher Education Sector
		Doctoral degree
		Master's degree
		Graduate diploma
		Graduate certificate
		Bachelor degree
	Advanced diploma	Advanced diploma
	Diploma	Diploma
	Certificate IV	
	Certificate III	
	Certificate II	
Senior Secondary Certificate of Education	Certificate I	

Schools Sector

Young people may attend government or non-government schools. Under both a tax-sharing and a quadrennial funding arrangement, the Commonwealth distributes funds to the states and territories which, in turn, are responsible for the school education system. The quadrennial funding is tied to national priorities (e.g., the improvement of literacy and numeracy outcomes for students). Generally, however, state and territory governments can and do operate independently in relation to school education policy and practice.

School education is generally divided into preschool, primary, junior secondary and senior secondary. The age of the student and stages vary slightly from state to state. Most children enter preschool around the age of 5. Primary school is generally years one to seven (ages 6 to 12 approximately). Junior secondary school is usually from years eight to 10 (ages 13 to 15 approximately), and senior secondary school is usually from years 11 to 12 (ages 16 to 17 approximately). There is no national minimum school leaving age: state and territory governments set their own legal leaving age: usually age 15 or 16.

The options for post-compulsory education are employment or further education and training through the higher education sector or through vocational education and training. The introduction of some vocational education and training offering in schools, articulating directly to apprenticeships, has increased the attractiveness of the vocational education and training option for some young people.

Vocational Education and Training Sector

Vocational education and training (VET) is offered by a wide variety of providers, including private organizations (registered training providers), TAFE colleges with substantial public funding, adult and community education organizations and, increasingly, schools. These organizations offer a wide variety of programs from preparatory to para-professional (sometimes professional) level. (See the Australian Qualifications Framework above.)

The administration of TAFE colleges, and public funding to adult and community education providers and private training providers, is the responsibility of the states and territories through their state/territory training authorities. This includes decisions on the types of courses offered.

The Commonwealth does not fund VET providers directly but funds state and territory training authorities through the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). ANTA is headed by an industry-based board that advises, and is responsible to, a ministerial council. ANTA liaises closely with governments, industry training advisory bodies, private and public

training providers and other stakeholders to ensure the national VET system is responsive to industry and client needs.

The improvement of school–industry links has been a national priority, and there have been a number of policy initiatives in that area. The Australian Student Traineeship Foundation established, and has played a key role in expanding and enhancing, school–industry joint initiatives to help students gain direct workplace experience and develop vocational skills before leaving school. Vocational education programs in senior secondary schools have been expanded. In 1998, about 75 percent of Australia's 2,458 schools and some 90,000 students were participating in VET in-school programs. Apprenticeships/traineeships in schools are provided in addition to general vocational education. Work placements in schools are broadening the range of ways in which students can participate in VET. The policy is based on the premise that the partnership between schools and employers enhances both employment and education for young people. The introduction of key competencies — those essential for the effective participation in the emerging patterns of work — in schools is designed to improve young people's preparation for employment. Likewise, the introduction of enterprise education is based on the need to move away from the assumption that all students will become employees. Through enterprise education initiatives, schools are now working toward a learning culture in which more students will be enthused about, and equipped to identify, create, initiate and successfully manage, personal, business, work and community opportunities.

Higher Education

Australian universities are autonomous, self-accrediting institutions, established by Commonwealth, state or territory legislation. These legislative instruments vest responsibility for governance and management in a governing body (a council or senate) which is accountable to the state or territory government (and in the case of two institutions, the Commonwealth). However, the Commonwealth plays a pivotal role in higher education policy and administration, flowing from its responsibility for funding public higher education institutions.

Employment Services

In 1998, the Commonwealth government implemented a fully competitive framework for the delivery of its labour market policies. Job Network replaced the 50-year-old, government-funded Commonwealth Employment Service (CES). Job Network is a national network of more than 300 private, community and government organizations contracted by the Australian government. Job Network members offer flexible and tailored assistance to job seekers depending on their level of need under five categories ranging from job matching to intensive assistance. Almost 30 percent of Job Network

organizations provide one or more services to disadvantaged groups, including youth, older job seekers, people with disabilities, lone parents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women, people of non-English-speaking backgrounds and the long-term unemployed.

The gateway to Job Network is Centrelink, which provides, among other thing, a uniform national service for registering job seekers, administering unemployment benefits, assessing job seekers' eligibility for labour market assistance, referring clients to Job Network assistance, administering the activity test and enforcing compliance with conditions of income support. There are around 290 Centrelink customer service centres across Australia.

Career Choices and Decisions

Critical career choice decisions by young people are usually made at the end of junior secondary school (i.e., subjects chosen for senior secondary school influence options for further education, especially tertiary entrance) and senior secondary school (in relation to education, training and employment options). Increasingly, school-based vocational education offerings in the last two years of school have the potential to influence career choices from secondary school. Some argue that vocational courses in schools can limit a young person's choices too early, while another camp argues that, because these courses can articulate through to higher levels of education and training, they prepare young people more effectively for employment or education and training. Generally, decisions are made on the basis of parental, teacher and peer influences, rather than formal selection processes, although specific criteria apply to university entrance.

Other critical decision points are at the transition between school, employment or unemployment, and further education. Recent global economic and technological changes have resulted in more older people becoming unemployed and seeking alternative occupations.

Current Provision of Career Guidance Services

Although there is no overarching national policy on career guidance services, Australian governments have adopted a number of strategies to improve outcomes for young people. Some of these are:

- Focus on the achievement of minimum standards by all students in basic skills such as literacy and numeracy in schools.

- Reform the content of senior secondary education, in particular, by increasing quality vocational orientation and the opportunities for young people to gain experience in business enterprises while still at school.

- Develop alternative post-school pathways, especially through the expansion of apprenticeship-type opportunities from traditional trades (which tend to be in industries with little job growth) to those industries (e.g., information technology, communications and services) where rapid job growth is occurring.

- Broaden the role of schools (and their links to the communities they serve) so they are better equipped to assist students suffering multiple obstacles to successful study and become proactive in linking young people to post-school employment.

- Provide information on the options available to young people in both education training and the labour market.

The Commonwealth government develops and distributes, in print and via the Internet, a range of occupational and labour market information products to assist individuals in career planning and decision making. The most significant of these products is the *Job Guide*, provided to all year-10 students in Australia, as well as being generally available to the public.

A career counselling program for the unemployed, especially young people, was introduced in 1998. A number of other programs at the Commonwealth and state/territory level incorporate various forms of assistance with career decision making (e.g., Job Pathways). Program brokers assist some young people to negotiate the transitions between school and employment, the Vocational and Educational Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme (VEGAS) funds projects for Indigenous school students and their parents, providing information about career and education options and developing positive attitudes toward participation in education.

The Commonwealth also operates a network of 12 career information centres which contain career information resources and offer service to the general public, job seekers, school groups, rehabilitation clients, migrants, etc. A network of Job Network Access centres gives job seekers access to information, computers, faxes, copiers and phones free of charge to assist them in their job search. ANTA funds the National Training Information System on the Internet, and the Commonwealth, state and territory governments contribute to OZJAC, a job and course explorer available on subscription on CD-ROM.

A strategic priority for the next 18 months for the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training is improving the information available, including careers information, that helps to guide choice within the education and training system. The Commonwealth is undertaking a scoping study in relation to a proposed national on-line career information system and, with the states and territories, through the MCEETYA, the

Career Education Task Force is examining the national requirements for career information advisory services. Through these initiatives, we hope to optimize outcomes for people in transition between school, work and further education, and to improve Australia's responsiveness to changes in the structure of industry, jobs and the labour market. It is also looking at the integration of career management skills into a range of other program and policy areas.

For the school sector, the 10th national goal in the 1989 MCEETYA is the provision of appropriate career education and knowledge of the world of work. The MCEETYA Taskforce for National Goals in Schooling is developing revised national goals. We understand that matters relating to career education are likely to remain prominent in the revised goals.

Currently, there is no explicit national policy statement for the role of career education and advisory services in the VET sector.

With regard to the university sector, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) published guidelines in November 1997 outlining the expectations and responsibilities for the universities and their students. These guidelines are intended to assist universities to formulate their own detailed statements and are not binding on AVCC members or other universities. Policy and provision of career education and advice in the higher education sector are the responsibility of individual institutions.

Delivery of Career Services in States and Territories

There is no single agency in each state/territory responsible for providing career education and advisory services to students in all sectors. With the exception of systemic/regional activities, decisions on actual provision are generally made at the school/institution level and, in many cases, it is not mandatory for schools/institutions to provide any or all of the range of possible career services.

Career education and advice in the education sector generally includes components of teaching and learning activities, information (including guest speakers, annual careers expos and higher education open days), counselling and experiential activities ranging from unstructured work experience to structured work placements. State/territory policy frameworks for the delivery of career education in the school sector range from explicit government-endorsed statements to implicit policy embedded in curriculum frameworks and arrangements in practice. The national schools curriculum profile for studies of society and the environment contains a "people and work" strand that provides for an emphasis on work-related education. There are very few programs at the primary level with the focus being largely on students in years nine and 10.

The variation of service delivery across states and territories reflects Australia's governmental structure. As the individual state and territorial governments have direct responsibility for education, their education *authorities have primary responsibility for careers service delivery in* schools. As the university sector operates independently, individual institutions have the primary responsibility for delivery. The open market approach to the vocational education and training sector means that individual providers and institutions are responsible for any careers service delivery. In the employment market, registered job seekers and unemployed young people may be referred to a career counselling program, delivered by the Commonwealth through a national provider. Depending on their level of need, unemployed people may also receive a range of services, including career guidance, from a Job Network provider.

This has resulted in each jurisdiction/sector/institution and provider choosing its own priorities and its own preferred mode of delivery. On the one hand, there is enormous diversity in the services provided under this unregulated approach, while on the other hand, there are significant examples of best practice and innovation in various parts of the country.

A demonstration of the diversity of approach in the schools sector is that while one state has a statement of career education outcomes for years seven through 12 for the guidance of teachers, it does not have a syllabus for career education. In another state, guidance counsellors take the lead role in providing career guidance in schools, with officers available to service all schools. Another state requires that its government school teachers incorporate the "people and work" strand in studies of society and the environment at least during every second year of schooling from kindergarten through to year 10. Yet another state has a common curriculum for years eight to 10 which includes career education as a compulsory 40-hour course.

Specialist career services are offered to students by most Australian universities. While these services operate differently across institutions, the key commonalities include:

- career, course and employment information, resources, advice and counselling;
- graduate destination surveying;
- career guidance programs;
- employment preparation programs; and
- graduate recruitment and employment facilitation programs.

There are a number of private practitioner organizations that specialize in various career development tools, career advice and guidance services around the country.

Careers and Information Technology

The identification of creative strategies for the use of career information technologies in the provision of career education and advice is constantly expanding. Many states and territories are developing initiatives to take advantage of opportunities in this area. In addition, the Commonwealth has developed the Australian Career Directory, an Internet site <http://www.detya.gov.au/ty/careers/default.htm> which includes a wide range of career, occupational and labour market information. In one state, The Virtual Campus, an interactive VET site allows individuals and enterprises to identify, select, enrol and participate in training services operated by TAFE institutes and private providers. This service will include a VET advisory service, an information service and a help line for students, teachers and career advisers.

The resources for, quality, use of, and access to, information technology (IT) for careers services are still variable in most sectors. At least two state education authorities are rapidly expanding IT access, aiming to have all schools and most curriculum materials on-line in the next few years.

Resources

School sector resources for career education are mostly located at the institution level with some limited allocation of dedicated personnel at systemic and regional levels. There is considerable variation in the levels and structure of staffing between and within states/territories and education and training sectors.

Some state and territory education authorities have reported that they have a dedicated policy officer for career education at the central office level. In one state, every secondary government school is allocated a career adviser responsible for developing and implementing a career education program. Each school has an allocation of 1.0 teaching staff for career education with an additional 0.2 allocation for schools with enrolments above 1,300 students. Central schools with large secondary age enrolment also receive staffing resources for career education. Many non-government schools have at least a part-time career adviser. Usually, a teacher fills the position on a reduced teaching load, or a school counsellor undertakes dual roles.

With the introduction of vocational education and training in schools, tensions have developed between the delivery of the vocational and careers agendas in an environment of scarce resources. Anecdotal reports suggest that in some jurisdictions, career advisers/teachers find their roles increasingly given over to vocational education and training co-ordination. However, in others, different people fulfil the positions of careers advisers and vocational placement co-ordinators.

Career professional resourcing in the vocation and university sectors is a matter for local institutions reflecting their corporate priorities and budgetary constraints.

Within the employment market, Job Network providers may offer career guidance and advice under their contract with the Commonwealth government to those clients receiving intensive assistance, although this is not mandated within their contract. The resources applied to Centrelink Career Information Centres are subject to national budget considerations, and there are no minimum qualifications for people delivering career information.

Education and Training of Career Professionals

Career practitioners enter the field through a range of education and training pathways. Although the numbers of qualified practitioners is gradually increasing, not all have tertiary qualifications or are members of professional organizations.

In Australia, there are approximately nine undergraduate courses with a specific career education/counselling component. The undergraduate background of most career practitioners is in teaching, psychology and social welfare or human resources management and does not entail specific career-related studies. There are four formal tertiary courses at the postgraduate level, ranging from graduate certificates to master's degrees. Distance education courses are available from two universities.

In 1992, the National Board of Education, Employment and Training (NBEET) outlined a set of professional competencies for career educators. Only the Australian Association of Career Counsellors has adopted these competencies. That association uses them as the basis for establishing professional membership eligibility. In the school sector in most states and territories, many career teachers/advisers do not have relevant qualifications although at least one state requires the completion of a six-month in-service course. Generally, careers professionals in the other education sectors have relevant qualifications.

Professional Associations

There are a number of industry bodies in the career field, and many are attempting to contribute to the growth and quality of career education and advisory services through professional development activities such as conferences, workshops and seminars and, in some cases, through their professional membership requirements. There is at least one industry association of some form in each state and territory, as well as at least two national bodies.

Current Policy Issues

In acknowledgment of the collaborative nature of this paper, it must be recognized that the identification of current policy issues depends on whether one comes from a national policy perspective or the perspective of a professional/practitioner. The following issues seem to span both perspectives.

In terms of national policy, there is general agreement that a more consistent (and perhaps, national) approach to career guidance services would enhance employment, education and training outcomes for both the national economy and the individual. It is agreed that national careers policies should assist the country to respond effectively in an environment where:

- people are making, and will continue to make, an increasing number of career/job changes through their working life;
- early school leaving increases the risk of unemployment; and
- new arrangements in the educational qualifications structure and the school/vocational education system mean that people need to be better informed about their options and how to manage the articulation possibilities which are emerging.

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